

VZCZCXYZ0011
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBHU #0005/01 0021522
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 021522Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2814
INFO RUCNMR/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000005

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PGOV EINV AR
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: MAYOR OF LA PLATA SEEKS CLOSER
BILATERAL TIES

REF: BUENOS AIRES 1653

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Mayor of Buenos Aires province's capital city of La Plata, Pablo Bruera, told Ambassador Wayne on December 15 that he hoped to improve public services to attract greater foreign investment. He applauded the arrival of U.S.-based software development company Accenture, which would bring 330 jobs to La Plata, Argentina's fourth most populous city. The Mayor said that he is working to establish La Plata as a "cultural city" but also hopes to make it a technological center. He praised the close cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in recent years and said he would like to deepen relations through cultural cooperation agreements. The Mayor made this appeal to the Ambassador for closer collaboration in the midst of a flap between the GoA and AES-owned local energy supplier Edelap (reftel). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Victory Front ruling party member and Kirchner ally Pablo Bruera, Mayor of Buenos Aires province's capital city, La Plata, on December 15 to follow-up on cooperation agreements discussed during the Ambassador's April 2008 trip to La Plata. Rafael Velazquez, executive secretary of Pro Humanae Vital Foundation, an NGO that focuses on career development programs, social action, welfare, and environmental issues, also attended.

The View from La Plata

¶3. (SBU) Mayor Bruera said the Buenos Aires provincial government has helped his city financially to endure the global economic crisis, but relayed that some projects are on hold for financial reasons. He cited as top priorities improving public services, in particular transportation, and attracting greater foreign investment. He applauded the arrival of U.S.-based company Accenture, which would provide 330 software development jobs to the local economy. The Mayor said that not only is he working to establish La Plata as a "cultural city" but he hopes to make it a technological hub and sees Accenture's presence as key to that effort.
(Note: Accenture later told the Commercial Counselor that the company decided to extend its operation in La Plata with a five-year lease on a property near the University of La Plata, and the Mission called public attention to the decision with a press release applauding the extension.)

Strengthening U.S. Ties

¶4. (SBU) Executive secretary and founding member of Pro Humanae Vital Foundation Rafael Velazquez expressed appreciation for the closer relations his foundation has had with the Embassy in recent years. He noted that 36 speakers have participated in the U.S. speaker program in La Plata on NGO management and advocacy, which he helped co-organize.

The Mayor and Velazquez also relayed that they were working to restore the "Children's Republic" in La Plata. They expressed interest in commemorating a 1950s visit to the park by Walt Disney. The Ambassador said FCS could help broker a meeting with Disney representatives. Mayor Bruera noted that he hoped to revive La Plata's sister-city relationship with Louisville, Kentucky, which he described as a relationship "on paper" only.

On Edelap

15. (SBU) When asked by the Ambassador about the recent dispute between the GoA and the Argentine energy supplier Edelap, which is majority owned by U.S.-based energy company AES, the Mayor said he believes the main issue is that Edelap, which he said provides energy to six cities, is unable to provide sufficient service because of a lack of investment on the part of AES, which he claimed AES itself has admitted. The Mayor described La Plata as a high consumer of energy because the country's most important petrochemical businesses are based there. The Ambassador highlighted as positive AES's announcement on December 14 that it intended to increase investment by ARP 300 million over five years, but noted that AES and other energy companies had long been seeking government authorization for tariff increases in order to allow for investment and re-investment in the sector.

16. (SBU) Following the meeting, in a December 16 interview with a La Plata news website, the Mayor provided details about his discussion with the Ambassador about Edelap and AES, saying he detailed "the deficiencies" of Edelap's service and discussed "the need for Edelap to make investments to improve service." He said the Ambassador was "confident" that the company would carry out its announced five-year investment plan.

BIO

17. (SBU) Bruera was elected Mayor of La Plata in October 2007, beating the Peronist party candidate and former Mayor Julio Alak by 25% of the votes. In 1997, Bruera was elected Municipal Counselor and president of the Peronist bloc of Municipal Counselors. In 2001, he was reelected for this post, where he served until 2005, when he was elected provincial deputy, working in that capacity until assuming his current post. Born in 1964, he is a relatively young mayor by Argentine standards. Bruera received a law degree from the National University of La Plata (UNLP), where he specialized in political science. Bruera also received a Master in Public Politics at Latin American Social Science Institute (FLACSO). He is married; he and his wife have three children.

Comment

18. (SBU) Despite political pressure to hit hard against AES-owned Edelap, the Mayor came to see the Ambassador to emphasize his objectives for making La Plata a friendly city for U.S. culture and investment. The gesture and his comments to the press reflect the Mayor's interest in working closely with the U.S. Embassy.

WAYNE